



Early Journal Content on JSTOR, Free to Anyone in the World

This article is one of nearly 500,000 scholarly works digitized and made freely available to everyone in the world by JSTOR.

Known as the Early Journal Content, this set of works include research articles, news, letters, and other writings published in more than 200 of the oldest leading academic journals. The works date from the mid-seventeenth to the early twentieth centuries.

We encourage people to read and share the Early Journal Content openly and to tell others that this resource exists. People may post this content online or redistribute in any way for non-commercial purposes.

Read more about Early Journal Content at <http://about.jstor.org/participate-jstor/individuals/early-journal-content>.

JSTOR is a digital library of academic journals, books, and primary source objects. JSTOR helps people discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content through a powerful research and teaching platform, and preserves this content for future generations. JSTOR is part of ITHAKA, a not-for-profit organization that also includes Ithaka S+R and Portico. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

THE CENTENARY OF THE ARCHDIOCESE OF QUEBEC

When was the Bishopric of Quebec raised to the dignity of a Metropolitan See?

Those who are familiar with Abbé Ferland's *Mgr. Joseph Octave Plessis, Evêque de Québec*, Monsignor Henri Têtu's *Les Evêques de Québec*, and Bishop Plessis' *Journal du Voyage en Europe* annotated by the same author are familiar with this very interesting event in our history. Having made a critical examination of the original documents used by these writers we are now able to shed additional light upon happenings both at home and abroad which first retarded, then precipitated, the realization of a most important fact in the development of the Catholic Church in Canada.

There is a twofold answer to the question above:

1. The See of Quebec was erected into an Archbishopric by Brief of His Holiness, Pope Pius VII, January 12, 1819. Hence the year 1919 is actually the centenary of that memorable event.

2. The Diocese of Quebec was made an Archdiocese, for the second time, on July 12, 1844, by Brief of His Holiness, Gregory XVI. Twenty-five years hence those who come after us will celebrate this glorious anniversary.

Those who are astonished, and even chagrined, that the See of Baltimore, created in 1790, should have become an Archdiocese in 1808, while the two-centuries old See of Quebec, which was a Vicariate-Apostolic in 1657 and a Titular Bishopric in 1674, did not become a Metropolitan See till 1819, will doubtless view the matter differently after reading the story of what rightly may be termed the evolution of the venerable See founded by the first of the successors of the Apostles, in North America, into an Archbishopric. In Canada, at the beginning of the nineteenth century the religious outlook was more promising than it was in the United States. The clergy and the Catholic population were numerically more influential; educational establishments and charitable institutions, were

organized on a relatively stable foundation; and the parochial system was in vogue in the eastern section of the country. On the other hand, the vastness of the territory (all Canada) made it impossible for the Bishop to exercise adequate supervision over his large diocese. For this reason an ecclesiastical division of the country was urgently necessary. As such conditions did not exist in the United States there was, of course, less need for new bishoprics.

Moreover, the normal status of a Church that has reached maturity, being an aggregation of minor jurisdiction attached, to an older Church, like daughters to a venerable mother, how did it happen that the Church in the United States antedated the Church in Canada in becoming a perfectly organized institution?

This may be ascribed mainly to the attitude of the respective governments towards the Church.

Development of the Church in Canada was retarded by the bigotry of the civil authorities, or we should say rather, by the antagonism of certain subordinates whose attitude towards the Church rendered it necessary that the Holy See and the Bishops of Quebec be extremely cautious in dealing with a government which, though at times favorably disposed, was thwarted in its policy by the jealousy and arrogant pretensions of the Anglican Establishment which was the only Church officially recognized within the Realm.

Must we infer from this that south of the fourth parallel the government and the people were more favorably disposed towards Catholicism? Far from it.

Every student of history knows the story of the bigotry of the Puritans who were obliged to leave England on account of their religious tenets. When they set foot upon free soil they endeavored to foist upon all who did not subscribe to their creed a régime more intolerable than they themselves had been subjected to in their homeland. The Code of the New England Commonwealth, which was more severe in its enactments than the Draconian Law, remains as an indelible blot on the annals of our neighbors across the border. It must, however, be stated that the rigorous legislation of the Puritans affected but a small section of the country; with the

signing of the Declaration of Independence, the Government of the United States became more tolerant—perhaps we should say, indifferent—in its attitude towards Catholicism. Then, there did not exist in the American Colonies a proselytising Anglican Church such as existed in our country which had recently fallen a victim to English conquest.

The American hierarchy consequently came into being without any manifest opposition on the part of the Government. Baltimore became an Archbishopric in 1808, with Boston, New York, Philadelphia, and Bardstown, as suffragan Sees.

Bigotry did not die out, however, as we know from certain happenings in Boston—a city whose population is largely Catholic today—where there were several outbursts of fanaticism, such as the burning of the Ursuline Convent, in Charlestown. It may be doubted even that bigotry has entirely disappeared from American soil.



The question of dividing the Diocese of Quebec arose for the first time in 1789, when Bishop Jean-François Hubert, writing to Cardinal Antonelli, Prefect of Propaganda, on October 24 of that year, submitted to him a project for the erection of a suffragan See at Montreal, in order to provide for the administration of the adjoining district. The Bishop suggested that the Coadjutor *cum futura successione* of Quebec, whose nomination had been tacitly approved of by the Government, should reside in Montreal. In making this proposition to the Holy See Bishop Hubert doubtless had in mind the application made by the clergy and the laity of Montreal, in 1783, for an episcopal See—a plea which, as Bishop Plessis said in later years—"had unfortunately been made in vain".

Bishop Hubert wrote this letter seemingly to ascertain the attitude of Rome on the subject, without hoping for a definitive reply. It was intimated that should the Bishop's proposal be acceptable to the Holy See, he would undertake the adjustment of the matter with the British Government. He says: "In this matter, as in others, we are obliged to take every precaution". And yet, England was represented at the time in Canada by Lord Dorchester, one of the most sympathetic of our English governors.

Replying, on November 28, 1793, to a later communication from Bishop Hubert (sent in 1790), Cardinal Antonelli assures him that the proposed division would be endorsed by the Holy See as soon as there was any tangible evidence that the Government would not object to it. He added, however, that owing to the difficulties which had recently arisen between Bishop Hubert and his Coadjutor (these were later amicably adjusted), he approved of the Bishop's plan to postpone the erection of the Diocese of Montreal to a later date.

Shortly afterwards the Holy See "of its own accord began negotiations destined in the near future to eventuate in the creation of a regular Metropolitan See"—the normal status of an organized Church.

The plan adumbrated by the Prefect of Propaganda to invest the Canadian Church with the dignity of a regular hierarchy without ruffling the susceptibilities of the British Government is given below. It may be said that this plan was similar to the one which Bishop Plessis, after Bishop Hubert, adopted, whilst awaiting something more satisfactory in the future. Despite this, Bishop Plessis has been unblushingly accused of inordinate ambition and of being desirous to centralize authority and of unreasonably retarding the creation of other independent Sees.

To obviate any difficulty with the Government in the creation of new Sees, it was suggested to select, with the approval of Rome, in addition to a Coadjutor *cum futura successione*, two other prelates, both of them auxiliaries, who would share the burden of the Bishop of Quebec. These would be under his jurisdiction and be placed wherever they should be most needed. Under this arrangement the civil government would become accustomed to the presence of Bishops in different sections of the country, and the way would be paved for establishing, later, bishoprics with ordinary jurisdiction. The Cardinal Prefect, being aware that, as a preliminary to the adoption of this plan, Monseigneur Denaut, the actual Coadjutor, should reside in Montreal, it was intimated that the Holy See would be pleased to make it effective at the earliest possible date.

As evidence that the British Government would not offer any opposition to the nomination of these bishops without a diocese, the Cardinal Prefect instanced the case of Newfound-

land where a similar event had recently occurred. The clergy and the laity of this Island which, till then, had been under the jurisdiction of the Bishop of Quebec, having petitioned the Holy See, through the Archbishop of Dublin, that Father James Louis O'Donnell, of the Order of St. Dominic,¹ then Prefect-Apostolic of Newfoundland and the adjacent islands, be invested with the episcopal character for the better administration of his charge, steps had been taken to ascertain if the Government would be adverse to such an appointment. As no objection had been raised, His Holiness was pleased to appoint Father O'Donnell Vicar-Apostolic of Newfoundland, with the title of Bishop of Thyatera, i. p. i.

"As the Government", wrote the Cardinal Prefect, "was not adverse to such an appointment in a country formerly subject to your jurisdiction but now immediately dependent on the Holy See, we feel confident that it will readily consent to the appointment of a second, and even a third, Coadjutor to aid you and relieve you of responsibilities. The Holy See requests the Bishop of Quebec openly to express his views on the subject".

The author of this letter was the famous Cardinal Gerdil, who, in the Conclave that elected Pius VII, at Venice, was one of the candidates, and might have been elected to the Papacy were it not for the exercising of the Veto—a privilege enjoyed and abused by Austria. This privilege was abolished by Pius X of blessed memory.²

We have quoted at some length from this document for we regard it as the preliminary charter of the successive establishment of the Metropolitan See and the Ecclesiastical Province of Quebec. It emanated from the Holy See and the program here outlined was carried out by Bishops Hubert, Denaut, Plessis, and Panet. God knows how faithfully they adhered to it; and none more religiously than the noble Bishop Plessis. Even after Rome deemed it necessary to pursue a different course, this good Bishop, while respecting the decisions of the Holy See, was

¹ A mistake of the copyist assigns Father O'Donnell to the Order of St. Dominic. Father O'Donnell belonged to the Order of St. Francis.

² Cardinal Gerdil was a native of the little village of Samoens, in Upper Savoy. We caught a glimpse of this little Alpine hamlet whilst visiting the College of Tanenges, some years ago.

careful in the exercise of the privileges of his new position not to give offence to the Court of St. James or to expose the Court of Rome to the least reproach.

Following the plan outlined by Rome, Bishop Plessis, in his correspondence, reverts repeatedly to the division of his diocese—a division which was desirable, and even urgent. Writing to Cardinal Pietro, Prefect of Propaganda, February 20, 1806, he says that, though nineteen-twentieths of the people of Canada are Catholics, it would be impossible to create an Archdiocese there until the Holy See should be in a position to take the question up directly with the Court of St. James. Failing this, he would be willing to essay the program drawn up by Cardinal Gerdil, viz.: to nominate three Coadjutors instead of one. The Coadjutor *cum jure successionis* should reside in the district of Montreal; the second, in Upper Canada; the third, in the Provinces of the Gulf of St. Lawrence. The first nomination should be made for Upper Canada. He stated that serious difficulties existed in the Province of Nova Scotia owing to the attitude of the Protestant clergy. He also asks the Holy See to procure for Bishop Panet, his Coadjutor, who wished to reside in Montreal, a pension equal to one-half the revenue of his parish.³

In correspondence of a later date, which was delayed sometimes for years, owing to the captivity of Pius VII, mention is frequently made regarding the procedure to be observed in appointing other suffragans to meet the ever-increasing demands of a diocese of vast extent, without incurring the displeasure of the British Government.⁴

When Cardinal Litta announced to the Bishop of Quebec (April 16, 1816), the first division of his Diocese, by the creation of the Vicariate-Apostolic of Nova Scotia and the promotion of the Very Edmund Burke to the episcopate with the title of Bishop of Sion, i. p. i., he immediately (October 16, 1816) renounced jurisdiction over the peninsula which now had a Bishop independent of Quebec. Thus he proved the sincerity of his

³ Riviere Ouelle, in the County of Kamouraska, P. Q.

⁴ A letter from Cardinal Litta, Prefect of Propaganda (September 12, 1809), addressed to Bishop Plessis, never reached its destination. A copy of this had to be obtained from the Roman Archives.

wish to divide his diocese which, even yet, was too extensive. An abstract of the correspondence with Rome, which he made at the time, indicates that the design of the Holy See was to make Quebec a Metropolitan See on which other Bishops to be appointed should depend either as Titulars, or as Coadjutors. But, as a preliminary step, it would be necessary to secure for the Bishop of Quebec and his Coadjutor *cum jure successionis*, the recognition of the British Government.

A memorial to this effect was submitted to the authorities in London in 1812; but up to the date of writing no reply had been received. While temporarily accepting this incomplete form of hierarchy and conforming to the plan of the Holy See, Bishop Plessis observes: "those episcopal Vicars-General, Vicars-Apostolic, and Coadjutors without right of succession, would never command respect, would not enjoy any prestige, could not help the advancement of religion so effectively as could a regularly established hierarchy consisting of a Metropolitan and several suffragans." This is what he always aimed at in order to promote the welfare of the Church in Canada; but he did not hope to see it realized until the Holy See could deal directly with the British Government and counteract the baneful influences which were operating to the detriment of the Crown and to the injury of religion in this part of the Realm.

Writing to Cardinal Litta, December 1, 1817, Bishop Plessis reiterates the many unsatisfactory results that would follow the establishment of independent Sees. He insists that under this arrangement there would be no unity of action, no means of holding councils, no possibility of providing priests. He says that he does not understand why a regular hierarchy should not be established if England allows the creation of Vicariates-Apostolic; and adds: "I do not see why the Church of Quebec—the oldest in North America—should not be raised to the dignity of a Metropolitan See as well as the Church of Baltimore which was erected into a Bishopric only in 1791."

It is evident that the Bishop of Quebec does not fail to insist upon the rights of the Church of Quebec. To safeguard these rights and to provide for its perfect organization in the near future, he consents to a division of his diocese on condition that the Vicariates-Apostolic that might be detached from it,

should remain dependent upon the Mother Church till such time as they would be in a position to become suffragan Sees. His contention was that only in this way the plan outlined by Cardinal Gerbil to Bishop Hubert, in 1796, could be fully realized.

In a communication to Cardinal Litta, July 26, 1818, Bishop Plessis gave him credence not a confirmation destined to effect results which the Bishop has not anticipated; for it induced the Holy See to believe that the greatest obstacle to the erection of Quebec into an Archbishopric had been removed. The information was to the effect that Lord Bathurst, Secretary of State for the Colonies, in offering him a seat in the Legislative Council (by letter, January 13) officially recognizes him as Bishop of Quebec. "It is the first time," writes Bishop Plessis, "that the Catholic Church has been recognized officially in this country." He visions the prospect of an early consummation of his plans for the advancement of the interests of the Church in Canada; and as a result he decides to visit Europe and discuss the prospects *viva voce* with Propaganda.

* * *

Bishop Plessis sailed from Quebec on July 3, 1819. After a short stay in Liverpool he reached London August 14. Shortly after arrival there disquieting news from his Coadjutor reached him and caused him to feel that his last communication to the Holy See had produced an impression which was likely to cause serious complications. The Bishop tells us in his Diary in language clear and precise the nature of this troublesome episode:⁵

"The Bishop of Quebec had undertaken this journey to Europe for several reasons, chief of which was to arrange for the division of his Diocese into suffragan bishoprics, either Coadjutorships, or Vicariates-Apostolic. This matter required very delicate treatment and demanded considerable diplomacy when dealing with the British Government. His reputation at the Court of St. James, whether deserved or not, caused him to entertain hopes of success in his venture. Should he be successful in gaining the first point, he might score another, and

⁵ *Journal d'un voyage en Europe, par, Mgr. Joseph-Octave Plessis, Evêque de Québec, 1819-20.* Published by Mgr. Henri Têtu, Québec, 1903. Bishop Plessis always writes of himself in the third person.

finally extricate the Canadian episcopate from the parlous condition in which it had lain since the conquest of the country by England, some sixty years before."

"The disquieting news received came by letter from his Coadjutor who informed him that just a few hours after the Bishop's departure from Quebec, Bulls had arrived from the Holy See erecting the Church of Quebec into an Archbishopric, and giving him, instead of suffragans, two Scotch Vicars-Apostolic, one for Upper Canada, the other for the Gulf of St. Lawrence—a most unsatisfactory division, which disarranged his plans. It was furthermore likely to give offence to the clergy in Canada and would possibly make it difficult to arrange for two other Sees. The two Vicars-Apostolic above mentioned had already been discussed, and the Bishop was under the impression that his letters to Rome had made it clear to the Holy See that it would be advisable to postpone the matter pending further communication. The phase of the subject which the Bishop considered the most regrettable was that Quebec should have been erected into a Metropolitan See without having had previous communication with the British Government. This would doubtless interfere with his plans. Naturally he was very much distressed during an interview with Lord Bathurst, the Secretary of State for the Colonies, to whom he made a detailed report of the case. This report, as might be expected, aroused a great deal of resentment on the part of Lord Bathurst, who immediately sent for Dr. Poynter⁶ with whom he lodged a complaint against the Holy See and ordered that it be immediately forwarded to Rome.

Having recovered from this first shock, Bishop Plessis immediately set about to remedy the compromising situation caused by the issuance of a Bull erecting his Bishopric into a Metropolitan See. The Bull was dated January 12, 1819; had been duly drawn up by the authority of the Holy See, and signed by His Holiness, Pius VII. There could, consequently, be no question of having it revoked. Yet there was nothing to preclude its amplification by adding to the two Vicariates mentioned therein, two new Sees, Montreal and St. Boniface. This

⁶ Bishop William Poynter, Titular of Halia, i. p. i., Vicar-Apostolic of the Midland District, England.

was the purport of the memorial formulated in Rome November 17, and addressed to Cardinal Fontana.

As regards the new dignity conferred upon him by the Holy See, Bishop Plessis, while expressing his deep gratitude for the unexpected promotion, decided, if agreeable to Rome, not to assume the title or the insignia of an Archbishop. Hence he did not postulate the Pallium, nor did he ever sign documents as Archbishop. Thus he avoided in official acts and in pontifical functions everything that might give umbrage to the civil authorities, or cause misunderstandings with the Holy See. Yet Rome addressed him as Archbishop; and pursued a similar policy towards his immediate successor, Bishop Bernard-Claude Panet.

Bishop Plessis wrote to the Prefect of Propaganda, on August 14, 1819, telling him of the impression made by the report of the erection of Quebec into a Metropolitan See; but he reserved further discussion of the subject until his arrival in Rome when he would submit to the Holy See a more satisfactory plan for the division of his diocese than that which was merely outlined in the Bull.

In the following paragraphs we give a *résumé* of the document which was instrumental in completing the division outlined in the Bull of January 12, 1819, and in effecting the attainment of the object which the Bishop of Quebec had mainly in view when he undertook his first, and only visit *ad limina*.

The total Catholic population of Canada at the time was approximately 500,000 souls: of these, 450,000 were in the Province of Quebec. Hitherto this large flock had been under the direction of a single Spiritual Head, excepting the Province of Nova Scotia, of which, at his own request, the Reverend Edmund Burke had been appointed Vicar-Apostolic by the Holy See. In order more adequately to provide for the spiritual needs of his diocese with which recent pastoral visitations had made him acquainted, the Bishop of Quebec requested that, in addition to the Bishop of Saldes,⁷ his Coadjutor *cum futura successione*, he might be granted four other suffragans or Coadjutors endowed with the episcopal character, and that his Diocese be divided into five sections:

⁷ Bishop Panet.

1. Quebec, which would comprise the districts of Quebec, Three Rivers, and Gaspé, with 200,000 Catholics.

2. In the same Province, the district of Montreal containing 200,000 Catholics, was to be assigned to the Reverend Jean Jacques Lartigue, a Canadian priest, about forty-two years old.

3. That the whole of Upper Canada, where there were some 15,000 Catholics among a large population of heretics, should be entrusted to the Reverend Alexander Macdonell, a Scotch priest.

4. The fourth section comprising the Province of New Brunswick, Prince Edward Island, Cape Breton, and the Magdalen Islands, with about 10,000 Catholics, should have as its Spiritual Head, the Reverend Bernard Angus McEachern. In the event of the death of Bishop Burke,⁸ Vicar-Apostolic of Nova Scotia (which has a population of 8,000 Catholics) the province should be annexed to the same district.

5. The fifth division, embracing all the territory watered by the rivers flowing into Hudson and James Bays, bounded: on the South, by the 49th parallel; on the West, by the Rocky Mountains; on the East, by the Provinces of Upper and Lower Canada, with no established boundary on the North, containing a population of four or five thousand Catholics and a large aboriginal population who in time would doubtless be brought into the fold, should be entrusted to the Reverend Joseph Norbert Provencher, a Quebec priest, thirty-two years old.

As regards the immense area extending from the Rocky Mountains to the Pacific Ocean, this is still beyond the outposts of civilization, and unorganized. There is no prospect of founding a Church in this section at the present time; but it is hoped that the aboriginal tribes scattered over this region will at no distant date be drawn into the Church when the neighboring tribes shall have been converted. Scarcity of missionaries just now precludes the Bishop of Quebec from exercising spiritual authority in this direction. Possibly either Russia,⁹ or California¹⁰ could more easily undertake this work.

⁸ Bishop Burke died November 20, 1820.

⁹ It is well known that the Jesuits, after their suppression, had found an asylum in Russia.

¹⁰ Several months were to elapse before Bishop Modestus Demers, the pioneer apostle of British Columbia, started from Quebec to evangelize this country.

In a confidential note accompanying this document, Bishop Plessis reminds his Eminence, Cardinal Fontana, of Lord Bathurst's ill humor of which the Cardinal has been apprized by Bishop Poynter. He also wishes to impress upon him that the Crown would not recognize the title of Archbishop since it would give him a too marked precedence over the Anglican Bishop. Finally, he deems it best not to assume the title, or rank, of Metropolitan.

The memorial was favorably received by Propaganda, and the Bishop's recommendations were immediately adopted. Father Lartigue was nominated titular Bishop of Telmosa, i. p. i., on February 1, 1821, and took up his residence at Montreal as Auxiliary-Suffragan of Quebec.

The Reverend Alexander, nominated Bishop of Rhesina, i. p. i., was consecrated December 31, 1820, and remained at Kingston. Father James Norbert Provencher was appointed Bishop of Juliopolis, i. p. i., May 12, 1823, and became the first Vicar-Apostolic of the Canadian Northwest.

The Reverend Bernard Angus McEachern was elected Bishop of Rosa, i. p. i., and continued to reside at Charlottetown, Prince Edward Island.

Those Bishops were under the jurisdiction of the Bishop of Quebec until conditions warranted the erection of their respective Sees into autonomous Bishopsrics.¹¹

This happy consummation was not long delayed; and then, all opposition on the part of the British Government having disappeared, the venerable Church of Quebec was free to assume the dignity of a Metropolitan See to which it really had been entitled since January 12, 1819.



The second Bull, erecting Quebec into an Ecclesiastical Province, with Montreal, Kingston, and Toronto, as suffragan

¹¹ What Cardinal Gerdil foresaw, in 1776, then became an accomplished fact. The Government and the people became accustomed to the presence of these bishops; bigotry died out; relations with the civil authorities became cordial; and, above all, the unswerving loyalty of the leaders of the Church in Canada had removed every pretext for opposition when Kingston became an independent See on January 27, 1826. Toronto was soon afterwards erected into an autonomous bishopric, December 17, 1841.

Sees, set the last jewel in the crown of the Church to which rightfully belongs the designation of Mother-Church of North America, and lent further lustre to the name of the great Laval who founded it.

When, in the days to come, the archivist of the Archbishopric is invited to furnish data for the celebration of the hundredth anniversary of the Bull erecting Quebec into a Metropolitan See for the second time, he will find plenty of material to interest all who delight in old memories, in the Roman correspondence on the subject and in the story of conferring the Pallium.

THE RT. REV. LIONEL ST. GEORGE LINDSAY, PH.D., D.D.,
Dean of the Cathedral Chapter,
*Quebec.*¹³

¹³ Monsignor Lindsay died at Quebec on February 10, 1921.